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SUBJECT: REPRIMAND OF TURKMENISTAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

MINISTER, A COMMENT ON THE IMPORTANCE PUBLIC IMAGE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Richard Miles. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (U) President Berdimuhamedov reprimanded the Minister of Communications, Resulberdi Hojagurbanov, by a decree published in Neytralniy Turkmenistan on January 2, "for shortcomings in implementing the President's instructions for transmission of the New Year's greetings from the provinces."

The decree noted that faulty technology used in the official New Year's television transmission impaired the quality of transmitted sound, and ended with a warning that the President would fire the Minister if he neglected to take necessary corrective actions. One example of what happened is that viewers of the program were unable to hear an elderly citizen of the Ahal province during his congratulatory speech. At the end of his speech, the technical problem was resolved.

¶2. (C) Head of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Resident, Neil McKain, told the Director of the U.S. Trade and Development Agency Europe and Eurasia, Daniel Stein, that he had heard that Hojagurbanov has contacts in Turkmenistan's security agencies that will likely protect him from losing his job.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: The decree underscores the importance the president places on maintaining a positive public image -- especially as it concerns technology. The presidential administration was likely very embarrassed by this gaffe. The fact that Hojagurbanov is unlikely to be fired is an indication of the influence that security agencies have in even the most distant ministries. END COMMENT.

MILES